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ABSTRACT

The early elementary teacher must find a reasonable solution to the question of how to best meet the needs of incoming 5-year-olds. This study reviews recent research on the academic and emotional needs of young students and on existing programs dealing with school readiness. Brief annotations are presented for 54 research articles. These articles deal with environmental and educational factors contributing to school readiness, school readiness screening instruments, and existing programs that offer alternatives to entry according to chronological age. A five-page summary discusses the findings of these studies. On the basis of the review, it is recommended that (1) children enter school at the traditional starting age requirement; (2) after the initial kindergarten experience, each child undergo screening to indicate readiness for first grade; and (3) a transitional program be offered for children needing a year to grow and mature before entering first grade. (CB)

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AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY REVIEWING RECENT RESEARCH DEALING WITH FACTORS AND INNOVATIONS OF SCHOOL READINESS

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INTRODUCTION

In school systems across the United States, communities are taking an in-depth look at early grade school education. In response to the increased research, knowledge, and focus on the early years of life and early education, parents, teachers, and education policymakers have been unable to form a general consensus on a specific plan of action. However, they do agree that kindergarten and first grade classrooms should offer more in the field of cognitive skill training; that parental involvement is critical in the preparation of a child for learning; that a child has the right to a childhood and should not be hurried.

In response to the condensed childhood that seeks to prepare children for the competitiveness of adult life, authors, such as David Elkind, are speaking of the harsh consequences of overscheduling children at younger and younger ages. The overscheduled elementary school child of ten years ago, with days consisting of school, music lessons, gymnastics classes and Cub Scouts has evolved into the present day of nursery school, play group, and dance lessons for the preschooler.

Societal forces continue to push elementary schools into the direction of hardcore academics. From 1965 to 1980 preschool enrollment of three- and four-year-olds tripled. (Bencivenga 1984). For many young, upwardly mobile parents living in metropolitan areas,the decision is not whether the child will attend a preschool, but rather which to attend. "Many feel they would be doing their child a disservice by not providing a leg up in the lifelong learning they know to be so essential. For some parents the commitment to early education has become part of a parent's legacy to a child." (Bencivenga 1984)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Chronological age is the most widely-used basis for school entry requirement in the United States. (Ames 1981) The general agreement comprises the view that its effectiveness is minimal and disregards individual developmental pace. The "age of entrance is only a means, not an end, and success in school" (Benedict, Gerardi, Coolidge 1983) is the goal of alternative programs forming in school districts, both public and private. The assessment of school readiness looms a vast, vague, yet paramount issue in the search for the answer to the question, when is the best age to begin formal education? In The Republic, Plato states, "Don't you know that in every task the most important thing is the beginning, and especially when you have to deal with anything young and tender?"

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The question of how to best meet the needs of incoming five-year-olds to the schooling process, is one with many, often-conflicting answers. Through review of recent research dealing with academic and emotional needs of young students and considering existing programs designed in response to the school readiness problem, the early elementary teacher may find a reasonable solution to individual matters being faced.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

In readings within the broad heading of "School Readiness", three distinct areas were defined: (1) Factors Contributing to School Readiness, (2) School Readiness Screening Instruments, and (3) Existing Programs Offering Alternatives to Entry Using Chronological Age.

The introductory section of the paper explores the physical, emotional and mental effects upon the developmental level of the child. The roles of linguistic development, reading level, learning style, cognitive development, and motivation are explored as to their effect on school readiness. The second section of the paper reviews several screening instruments commonly used to assess school readiness. The third section will discuss "readiness" programs and alternatives within the school environment and how they address the problem of determining when a child is ready for school and how to strive for the goal of school success for as many children as possible.

This study has sought to place the child in the central position, seeking a solution to how a rigid system of education can accommodate the developmental pace of individual children with due respect shown each child.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The investigation was restricted by a time limitation and availability of several resources, due to time and facility restrictions. The study is not exhaustive, however the premise was supported and further reading and study has been encouraged through this initial study.

GLOSSARY

affective domain - school curriculum referring to the emotional aspect of students

chronological age - age referring to sequential years

developmental age - age referring to the natural process of growth

early-entry to school - entrance to formal school prior to legal state or community requirement

gifted children - possessing innate superior abilities

preschool - educational programs prior to entrance in a kindergarten

preschool intervention - programs designed specifically to enhance homes deprived of adequate stimulation

readiness programs - a program designed to teach school readiness skills

school readiness - the acquisition of skills necessary for school success

ANNOTATIONS

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL READINESS

Environmental Factors

Snow, Catherine E., "Literacy and Language: Relationships During the Preschool Years", Harvard Educational Review, May 1983, 53:165-89.

Snow outlined the similarities in the development of language and literacy, using recent research, she supported the argument that working-class and minority children are not deficient in language, but are different. Their language is as complex and complete as that of middle-class children. Snow contended that reading failure is linked to the susceptibility of failure inherent in the atmosphere of formalized instruction, rather than ability differences.

Metzer, Lynn J., "Developmental Attainment in Preschool Children: Analysis of Concordance Between Parents and Professionals", Journal of Special Education, Summer 1983, 17:203-13.

This study was directed to assess correlation between parents' observation and information of their child's developmental status with the observation of professionals. Implications of the study were varied. Parental reports of their child's functional competence were consistent within broad developmental areas to assessment by professionals. "This suggests that parent observations may be particularly helpful in the search for early precursors of potential school difficulty." (p 210) The findings supported current emphasis (resulting from P.L. 94-142) on parent participation in the decision-making procedure.

Guthrie, John T., "Preschool Literacy Learning", The Reading Teacher, December 1983, 37:318-20.

Guthrie cited Catherine Snow's thesis that learning to speak and learning to read at home have significant parallels. "Both grew out of social interactions between the child and parents, and these processes are sometimes complex." (p 319) The ability to recognize and name letters and words is not in itself an indicator of reading success; however, this achievement is an indicator of many cognitive processes which combine to form the antecedents of early reading, contended the author.

Burgess, Joanne C., "The Effects of a Training Program for Parents of Preschoolers on the Children's School Readiness", Reading Improvement, Winter 1982, 19:313-18.

The training program was implemented to fill the gap left when the child alone is involved in a preschool intervention program. "...There is some evidence that programs emphasizing parent-child interaction in the home have had later impact on the child in the school setting." (p 316) The study indicated that parent-child interaction was a significant factor and that it is possible that continued interaction in the home will help to sustain the gains made during the preschool program.

Swanson, Beverly, "The Relationship Between Attitude Toward Reading and Reading Achievement", Educational and Psychological Measurement, Winter 1982, 42:1303-4.

Little practical significance was afforded this study by Swanson, as attitude surveys were lacking reliability. It appeared from the samples that early readers exhibit positive attitudes toward reading. "It is not until learning to read becomes more of a 'task' that the negative attitudes are established." (p 1304)

Pollitt, Ernesto; Mueller, William and Leibel, Rudolph L., "The Relation of Growth to Cognition in a Well-Nourished Preschool Population", Child Development, October 1982, 53:1157-63.

The authors concluded that in well-nourished schoolchildren there is a small, yet statistically significant, covariation between physical maturity and mental development independent of socioeconomic variables. The data show "that children who are more physiologically advanced are likely to have an advantage in mental development." (p 1162) The authors did not find a relationship between head circumference and mental test scores.

Smith, Carol L. and Tager-Flusberg, Helen, "Metalinguistic Awareness and Language Development", Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, December 1982, 34:449-68.

The authors found that preschoolers' metalinguistic capacities are more extensive than has been previously acknowledged. They also found there was a strong relationship between metalinguistic judgment tasks and measures of language development in the observed children. "...Understanding the many reasons for variations in metalinguistic development may help us to know how to intervene more effectively." (p 466)

Siegel, Linda S., "Reproductive, Perinatal, and Environmental Factors as Predictors of the Cognitive Language Development of Preterm and Full-Term Infants", Child Development, August 1982, 53:963-73.

On the basis of data, the author concluded that it appears possible to predict cognitive and language development at age three, with reasonable accuracy, given several environmental and biological factors. "Socioeconomic status, birth order, maternal smoking, and in the case of the preterm group, severity of illness in the perinatal period were consistently the best predictors of subsequent development." (p 970)

Kontos, Susan, "Audlt-Child Interaction and the Origins of Metacognition", Journal of Educational Research, September/Octobe. 1983, 77:43-54.

Results of two studies with preschoolers revealed a significant amount of metacognitive content in parents' verbal directions to a task. Children improved after receiving help with the task; they also improved after practice alone without parental interaction. The results indicated that "explanations of the origin of metacognition must take into account both self-regulation and other-regulation in the development of strategic knowledge." (p 43)

Thies, Armin Paul, "Neuropsychology of Preschool Learning Styles", Early Years, August/September 1983, 14:24+

Speaking in terms of readiness skills, Thies offered suggestions for preschool learning styles, in view of the preschooler's cognitive growth. Styles included: motorically active, many activities of short duration, intersensory presentation, low degree of novelty, social learning situations, self-directed activities and modeling instruction. The styles accommodate the cognitive stage and foster growth developmental during the preschool years.

Gottfried, Adele Eskeles, "Intrinsic Motivation in Young Children", Young Children, November 1983, 39:64-73.

"Academic intrinsic motivation was defined as children's enjoyment of learning, interest in novelty, curiosity, persistence in difficult tasks, and perceptions of competence, mastery, and challenge." (p 69) To encourage intrinsic motivation, the author suggested a high orientation toward student autonomy, giving students practice in making choices, and using information feedback, in place of controlling rewards, to encourage children.

Cornell, Edward H. and Heth, C. Donald, "Spatial Cognition: Gathering Strategies Used by Preschool Children", Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, February 1983, 35:93-110.

The authors concluded from the study that "preschool children more easily detect the configuration of identical than different hiding places,and organized spatial strategies may be more obvious when configurations are symmetrical than when they are not. In other words, young children may more easily abstract a 'cognitive map' in a well-structured environment." (p 109) Five-year-olds systematically evoke memory, discrimination, and spatial-biases when solving a task.

Hawkins, Vincent J., "Curiosity: A Pre-requisite for the Attainment of Formal Operations?", Education, Fall 1982, 103:100-102.

In view of the fact that most people do not attain Piaget's fourth stage of cognitive development, formal operations, the author researched to find a causal factor. "The hallmark of formal operations is when all the hypotheses are examined." (p 100) Hawkins maintains that the arousing, maintaining, and developing curiosity would help some achieve the stage of formal operations who would otherwise not progress to that level. John Holt noted "that as educators, it is not uncommon for us to eliminate, not only students' curiosity, but their feeling that it is a healthy and admirable thing to be curious, so that by age ten most of them will not ask questions." (p 101)

Ames, Louise Bates, "How Do Your Children Grow?", Early Years, December 1981, 12:37-8 + 66.

Ames emphasized the Gesell Institute's position that "it is the child's behavioral or developmental age, rather than mere chronological age, intelligence quotient, or reading level, that should determine the time of school entrance." (p 38) Included is a checklist of questions for parents of behaviors associated with four-, five- and six-year olds. Guidelines were given for behaviors associated with readiness for kindergarten and first grade.

Sinatra, Richard, "The Parent's Role in Healthy Brain Development", Early Years, December 1983, 14:32-7+.

Sinatra outlined brain growth during the early years, stating the physiological facts that one-third of adult brain weight is complete by birth, two-thirds by the end of the first year of life, there are brain growth spurts at ages 2-4, 6-8, 10-12, and 14-16 years of age where 35% of brain weight is added. He stressed parents' involvement and crucial role during the early years, stressing the importance of conversation and interaction between child and parent.

Educational Factors

Gredler, Gilbert R., "A Look at Some Important Factors in Assessing Readiness for School", Journal of Learning Disabilities, May 1978, 11:284-90. discussion 13:243-8 May 1980.

Gredler cited foreign and American studies that concluded that school entry age does not correlate with increased reading ability. "The difference in mean ages of British and Swedish children is two years, and yet the percentage of poor readers at the end of first grade is essentially the same." (p 288) His advice to parents: "demand first grade placement with appropriate individualized instruction for their children who differ only 3 to 11 months in chonological age from their peers or whose IQ is 5-10 points below the 'normal range'." (p 289)

Toepfer, Conrad F., "We're Overchallenging Students," Educational Leadership, October, 1981, 39:56.

"The vertical curriculum has been built on the myth of a continuum of brain growth." (p 56) Toepfer offered references to research indicating growth spurts and plateaus of brain growth. "We need to make use of available tests of reading readiness to counteract the practice of beginning reading instruction for students who do not exhibit true readiness. We must be responsive to these youngsters' needs and stand up against the insistence that all students can read earlier." (p 56)

Collins, Cathy and Demos, Elene S., "Trends and Needs in Beginning Reading Instruction", Reading Teacher, May 1983, 36:900-904.

The article discussed responses of 25 countries using an alphabetic language system when answering a questionnaire to list new trends in early reading instruction. The major advancements tend to be "in the areas of greater participation and cooperation between home and school, attention to prereading assessment and evaluation coupled with providing earlier, more comprehensive screening and prereading experiences at very early ages." (p 904) All surveyed reported definite program improvements and definite needs i.e., personnel shortages, bilingual concerns and resources.

Hart, Leslie A., "Programs, Patterns and Downshifting in Learning to Read", The Reading Teacher, October 1983, 37:5-11.

Hart presented his "brain-approach" to the learning of reading. He detailed the pattern-detecting process and the sequence from language skills acquisition to reading skills. Hart's emphasis was on the active role of the individual learner who is moving through the dynamic process of learning. "We are active information processors who decode information coming in and recode it in our own terms in the process of learning it." (p 6) Hart discussed three brain-based concepts: programs, patterns and downshifting in the complex nature of learning as young children.

Gomberg, Adeline W., "Starting on the Alphabet", The Reading Teacher, November, 1983, 37:214.

Gomberg suggested personal ways to encourage exploration and practical, meaningful use of alphabet letters She recommended that teacher interaction and motivational enthusiasm is necessary for the often stumbling obstacle of learning alphabet letters for young children.

Christie, James F., "The Effects of Play Tutoring on Young Children's Cognitive Performance", Journal of Educational Research, July/August 1983, 76:326-30.

After 20-minute sessions of play-tutoring or skills-tutoring, two groups of preschoolers were evaluated on play quality, verbal intelligence and creativity prior, during and three months after the nine weeks' weekly session. Neither treatment resulted in significant increases in play quality. Both treatments resulted in stable gains in verbal intelligence and ideational fluency. Gains were attributed to "adult contact rather than by enhanced levels of play." (p 326)

Badian, Nathlie A., "The Prediction of Good and Poor Reading Before Kindergarten Entry: A Four-Year Follow-Up", Journal of Special Education, Fall 1982, 16:309-18.

Badian suggested that the prediction of reading can be as accurate for a four-year-old as it is for children completing kindergarten. "The advantage of identification before kindergarten entry is that it makes possible special educational help for high-risk children from kindergarten entry." (p 317) Badian supported the view that early identification followed by special tutoring has a "beneficial effect in reducing the incidence of reading disability." (p 317)

Kitano, Margie, "Young Gifted Children: Strategies for Preschool Teachers", Young Children, May 1982, 37:14-24.

A table listing behaviors and traits of the young gifted child was offered, including the areas of intellectual, creative, leadership, music and art giftedness. Behaviors also were listed for diagnosing giftedness in minority group children. In view of the fact that teachers are poor identifiers of gifted children (p 15), Kitano offered classroom activities designed to challenge the gifted and offer exposure to non-gifted children. Early school entrance and other forms of acceleration have proved positive yet, "teachers and parents seem to feel, however, that for some, social, emotional, and motor development lag behind the intellectual." (p 17)

Roberge, James J. and Craven, Patricia A., "Deductive Reasoning and Its Relationship to Reading Comprehension", School Science and Mathematics,

Deductive reasoning performances were compared between a group of high reading comprehension and low reading comprehension students. The pedogogical implications of the study included building an effective curriculum "which emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills we need (1) to be cognizant of the interrelationships between students' language and logical thinking abilities and (2) to develop instructional materials and teaching strategy which facilitate recognition of basic rules of logical inference." (p 75)

Giarelli, James M., "The Cognitive Developmental Theory of Moralization: Toward a Radical Political Reconstruction", Journal of Education, Fall 1982, 164:305-19.

Cognitive-developmental theory, associated with Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, are deconstructed and examined within a political framework. "For Kohlberg, the school is the best place for rearguard action, the last-gasp hope for liberalism to offer genuine opportunities for the kind of social life which will promote moral development. This has been the problematic for liberalism for the past two hundred years." (p 317) The author attempted to broaden the avenues available for reform.

Cherkes, Miriam, "Cognitive Development and Cognitive Style", Journal of Learning Disabilities, February 1983, 16:95-101.

The author concluded that a task is most manageable for children when information is "presented linguistically, as well as spatially-based responses are called for, when the terms are arranged in a mutually grammatically and spatially linear flow, and when the terms involve measurement rather than quantitative comparisons." (p 101) The changes in processing abilities appeared to be influenced by task demands and construction than to cognitive development or cognitive style. "If individual style has an influence at all, this appears to become the case only as age increases." (p 101)

Eisner, Elliot W., "The Contribution of Painting to Children's Cognitive Development", Journal of Education, Summer 1982, 164:227-37.

The study concluded that children's cognitive development would be enhanced through education in the arts. Described are consequences of art activity which lead to qualitative changes in the child's ability to think and perceive. Consequences included: learning that one can create images, that images created can function as symbols, that images can be used for symbolic play, the process of image-making involves making judgments, images can be related to other images to form a whole, they can create illusion, ideas and emotions not physically present can be symbolized through images, there are ideas, images and feelings that can only be expressed through visual form, and finally, that the world can be expressed and regarded as a source of aesthetic experience.

DiPasquale, Glenn W., Moule, Allan D., and Flewelling, Robert W., "The Birthdate Effect", Journal of Learning Disabilities, May 1980, 13:234-8. discussion 13:239-42, May 1980.

The authors presented their study of 552 children in grades kindergarten through 13 as to effects of birthdate on academic achievement. The conclusion supported the position that early-entry children are significantly more likely to be referred to Psychological Services for academic problems in the primary grades. "The fact that this birthdate effect is not apparent in the later grades might be interpreted as evidence that younger children catch up to their peers or outgrow their difficulties." (p 237) They continue, "But it is not known if they do so spontaneously or because of intensive remedial assistance or grade repetition." (p 237)

Maddux, Cleborne D., Stacy, Don, and Scott, Mary, "School Entry Age in a Group of Gifted Children", Gifted Child Quarterly, Fall 1981, 25:180-4.

A study of gifted fifth through eighth graders in an eastern Texas program for the academically gifted was used to see effects of early and late entry into first grade. Birth dates, school entry age and data on family size and birth order were gathered and evaluated for the 188 children. "This discussion found that gifted children tend to have entered first grade when they were relatively old. All three analyses revealed significantly fewer early-entering gifted children and more late-entering gifted children." (p 182)

Williams, Mary Lynn, "Lucky Preschoolers Get A PEEP at Kindergarten", Early Years, May 1983, 13:33.

Williams introduced the PEEP program used at her school to familiarize next years' kindergartners to the kindergarten experience. During the preceding second semester to their enrollment, five-year-olds attend the kindergarten one hour weekly until summer vacation. PEEP helps preschoolers to overcome this fear by providing them with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the friendly world of kindergartners almost a year before they enter school." (p 33)

Lemons, Robert L. and Moore, Samuel C., "The Effects of Training in Listening on the Development of Reading Skills", Reading Improvement, Fall 1982, 19:212-16.

The authors connected the closely related skills of listening and reading, followed by explanation of the study aimed at testing the significance of listening training and its affect on reading as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test. A signficant difference was measured in those children in the experimental trained group, conclusive that the treatment did produce a profit.

Backman, Joan, "The Role of Psycholinguistic Skills in Reading Acquisition: A Look at Early Readers", Reading Research Quarterly, Summer 1983, 18:446-79.

Backman concluded from her research that we must be careful to not label, not "ready" to read, those children who seem to have deficiencies in one or more of the psycholinguistic skills of phoneme blending, discriminating and perceiving. Tests of these skills are not yet valid; they are not reliable measures of underlying skills. She maintained there are very few real prerequisites to reading acquisition. Instead, more probably there is an infinite number of facilitators included in the total reading experience itself.

Stevens, Jr., Joseph H., "From 3 to 20: The Early Training Project", Young Children, September 1982, 37:57-64.

The Early Training Project conducted with preschool, low-income, Black children in Tennessee was reviewed in a longitudinal study by Stevens. He concluded that, "Low-income children with improved cognitive and intellectual abilities are better able to perform the school tasks they encounter." (p 63) Long-term cognitive, social and self-esteem improvement was more profoundly noted in experimental females than males. "These data indicate that high quality, carefully developed preschool programs that produce immediate gains in intelligence and that significantly enhance primary school achievement also appeared to produce greater life success." (p 63)

Spodek, Bernard; David, Michael D. Saracho, Olivia N., "Early Childhood Teacher Education and Certification", Journal of Teacher Education, September/October 1983, 34:50-2.

The authors discussed nationwide changes in teacher preparation at the preschool and primary level. "Just as all of teacher preparation is in a state of flux, so early childhood teacher education is in a period of change." (p 52) Listed changes included time requirements in coursework, hours requirement in practicum experience, faculty and supervisory personnel training in early childhood education, additional coursework in related areas i.e., nutrition, music, art, parenting, etc.

NAEYC Staff, "How to Choose a Good Early Childhood Program", Young Children, November 1983, 39:28-32.

This guide was initially printed for parents as a checklist when "preschool shopping". Listed are a series of qualities of good preschools with learnings offered for expectations for kindergarten entrance. Rewritten to reflect current research and theory of developmental growth, it offers a sequential, thorough, detailed look at expectations in the areas of physical, personal and social growth.

Zigler, Edward F., Lang, Mary E., "Head Start: Looking Toward the Future", Young Children, September 1983, 38:3-6.

The authors cited long-term benefits measured in Head Start graduates, including higher reading and achievement scores than peers, placement in expected grade level, placement in regular classrooms "rather than in more expensive special education classes." (p 3) The authors credited success to the whole child approach to the cooperation between parents and the program. In view of Federal cutbacks, the authors stated, "Our nation must continue our various early intervention efforts...". (p 5)

NAEYC Staff, "Four Components of High Quality Early Childhood Programs: Staff-Child Interaction, Child-Child Interaction, Curriculum, and Evaluation", Young Children, September 1983, 38:46-52.

The four components are explained in detail as part of a nationwide voluntary accreditation system for early childhood centers serving children from birth to age five. The commentaries address the goals of the system (CAP - Center Accreditation Project) in trying to achieve the criteria of excellence.

SCHOOL READINESS SCREENING INSTRUMENTS

Fletcher, Jack M. and Satz, Paul, "Kindergarten Prediction of Reading Achievement: A Seven-Year Longitudinal Follow-Up", Educational and Psychological Measurement, Summer 1982, 42:681-5.

Using the Metropolitan Achievement Test, (vocabulary subtest) over a seven year period, the screening test was found to be stable and reliable by the authors. "Its economy of administration (20 minutes) and promising predictive relationship with word recognition skills, seven years later, lends credence to its utility as a screening instrument." (p 685)

Obrzut, John E., Bolocofsky, David N., Heath, Charles P., and Jones, Marilyn J., "An Investigation of the DIAL as a Pre-Kindergarten Screening Instrument", Educational and Psychological Measurement, Winter 1981, 41:1231-41.

This study investigated the validity of the Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL). Incoming kindergarten children were pre-screened with the DIAL, Slosson Intelligence Test, Metropolitan Readiness Test, and a Progress Report form at the end of the school year. The DIAL Concepts subtest was "the only significant predictor of Progress Report composite score." (p 1238)

Lichtenstein, Robert, "New Instrument, Old Problem for Early Identification", Exceptional Children, September 1982, 49:70-2.

The development, usage, and discussion of accuracy and limitations of the Minneapolis Preschool Screening Instrument (MPSI) was presented. The MPSI is a screening to indicate readiness for first grade. Lichtenstein summarized, "given the evidence, it appears that extensive assessment of young children at a single point in time is a poor investment of system resources. Alternatively, the use of brief, cost-effective identification procedures may lead to changes in the early identification process that improve accuracy in the long run. Children receiving special services can be assessed from their ongoing progress in intervention programs." (p 72)

Lipson, Alice M., "Catching Them Early", Academic Therapy, March 1981, 16:457-62.

The 20-minute screening test developed by a team of teachers in the Detroit Public Schools was explained. The screening is designed to be inclusive of key areas, yet within a kindergartner's attention span range. Significant areas include: gross motor development, perceptual motor development, auditory perception, speech and language development, visual-motor performance, and social/emotional development. The most important benefit is that "parents are informed early as to whether their child will progress normally or will need remediation in his educational program." (p 462)

Barclay, Lisa K., "Developmental Screening of Early Childhood Skills", Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, December 1983, 18:94-100.

Barclay addressed the need of teachers working with young children to screen and interpret developmental levels of incoming students. She developed a systematic program that involves parents, student and teacher counselor that will assess development in four major areas of school-related skills: sensory-motor-perceptual, discrimination learning, self-concept and social skills. The screening was designed to diagnose and plan interventions to alleviate more serious problems in later school life.

Erwin, T. Dary, "The Scale of Intellectual Development: Measuring Perry's Scheme", Journal of College Student Personnel, January 1983, 24:6-12.

Four factors analyzed by a new student development instrument included: dualism, tendency to see issues in clear-cut terms, relativism, recognizing that alternative perspectives exist, committment, acceptance of responsibilities and making major decisions, and empathy, awareness of one's decisions' impact on other people. The purpose of the study was to produce an objectively scored instrument to measure intellectual development. Follow-up was an indicated need.

Troike, Rudolph C., "Can Language Be Tested?" Journal of Education, Spring 1983, 60:209-215.

Troike concluded that "language tests" are, in fact, tests of memory, metalinguistic awareness or test-wiseness. "...What has not been generally recognized is that the tests may not actually be testing language." (p 209, author's emphasis) In testing a skill as complex as language, Troike suggested focusing on uses of language rather than on a test of language ability. The use of language in practice is more valid and educationally relevant was Troike's conclusion.

Muir, Sharon Pray, "Intelligence Tests Reconsidered", Social Education, January 1984, 57:66-72.

The critique and commentary on the validity, use and prediction index of school success stressed that the IQ tests did measure success within a traditional education environment. "Perhaps the inequities lie in traditional education rather than merely in tests." (p 78) The author stressed, "Misinterpretation is reflected by misconceptions about scores or the nature of what they measure. It occurs when schools put labels on children and when people view IQ scores as measures of innate ability. Misinterpretation results from carelessness, insensitivity, or ignorance. Banning IQ tests will not prevent human error." (p 78)

Morris, Robert C. and Melvin, Emily A., "An Assessment of Student Perceptions of Needs Deficiencies", Education, Fall 1981, 102:2-12.

The authors conducted a study to investigate the self-assessment of needs by students using a basis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. They concluded that given the low ratings on needs assessment, "educators need to identify better the needs deficiencies within student groups. To label students, for example, without first studying related socio-biographical variable is detrimental to the whole concept of education..." (p 11)

EXISTING PROGRAMS OFFERING ALTERNATIVES TO ENTRY USING CHRONOLOGICAL AGE

May, Charles R. and Campbell, Rose Marie, "Readiness for Learning: Assumptions and Realities", Theory Into Practice, Spring 1981, 20:130-4.

In response to the recent "springing-up" of readiness classes in the United States, the authors discussed underlying concepts of these programs. "...One finds that the readiness concept evolved out of a climate where large numbers of children were failing in school." (p 134) The developmental approach suggested "should fit the child, fit reading, and fit the general goal of education." (p 134) The authors reviewed previously published goals of preschool experiences. Gray (1925) stated six experiences crucial to children for preparation for reading. These included:

1. Wide experience in harmony with the child's interest.
2. Reasonable facility in the use of ideas.
3. Sufficient command of simple English sentences.
4. Relatively wide speaking vocabulary.
5. Accuracy in enunciation and pronunciation.
6. A genuine desire to read.

The authors cited recent research reaffirming these six experiences as essentials.

Caldwell, Bettye, "Should Four-Year-Olds Go to School?", Young Children, May 1983, 38:48-50.

Caldwell clarified formal education as "education that is appropriate for their stage of growth and development." (p 50) She suggested that educators of young children be open-minded and be willing listeners to ensuing proposals and programs dealing with the beginning of formal education at earlier ages. She stated the need for such for children coming from limited growth-fostering environments, homes filled with stress-producing experiences and homes lacking developmental opportunities.

Benedict, Gary C., Gerardi, Rober J., and Coolidge, Paula E., "Early Entrance Into Kindergarten Isn't for Everyone", Reading Improvement, Fall 1983, 20:193-6.

The early entrance program to kindergartens in the Mukwonago, Wisconsin Public Schools is outlined by the authors. The four-year-old policy was an attempt to address the issue of a child's predicted school success as primary concern above chronological age requirements for school entrance. The summary states, "age of entrance is only a means, not an end, and success in school is our main goal for students." (p 196)

Haake, Bernard, "The Easy Way", Learning Today, Spring 1981, 14:64-66.

Haake suggested that in place of starting "in clusters of 25 on the 5th of September" (p 65) regardless of how a student is prepared for formal schooling, that children begin school on their fifth birthday. Consequently, grades, the conept of class, ranking, testing would be replaced with truly individualized learning. "Starting school on your birthday would not only prevent the system from iatrogenically continuing to cause as much failure and dropping out as it currently does, but would, in fact, cause schools to retool so that children could do what they are in school to do. Learn." (p 66)

Curry, Mildred, "Held Back in Kindergarten", Early Years, December 1982, 13:P3,P27.

Common misconceptions are listed, together with characteristics of immaturity "(the real reason for kindergarten retention)". Curry presented the viewpoint that retention at an early age (P3) allows the child necessary time to grow before entering first grade. To parents Curry's advice was, "Just remember that a good many great minds have developed on slow timetables, and accept the retention gracefully." (p P27)

Solem, Maizie R., "Junior First Grade: A Year to Get Ready", Phi Delta Kappan, December 1981, 63:283-4.

To meet the needs of children completing the kindergarten school year; but, because of developmental lag, physical, emotional, or behavioral factors hampering learning, a "junior-first-grade program" was developed in the Sioux Falls (South Dakota) School District in 1970. Kindergarten teachers identify candidates using their own observation and judgment, the Metropolitan Readiness Test and an informal Pupil Behavior Rating Scale. Characteristics were explained of generally exhibited traits in children needing the transitional year before first grade.

The author closed with Plato's quote from The Republic, "Don't you know that in every task the most important thing is the beginning, and especially when you have to deal with anything young and tender?" (p 284)

Ballard, Sara, "Off to a Good Start!", Instructor, April 1981, 90:50-2.

Each child entering kindergarten in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is screened through a variety of tests and discussions as part of the systems Academic Readiness Program. If evaluated as needing extra help for skill deficiencies, the child would be assigned to work with the full-time academic readiness teacher assigned to each of the 20 schools in the system. The teacher would work with the child individually or in small groups in areas including, language skills, body awareness and control, visual spatial relations, auditory perception skills, fine and gross motor skills, reading and number readiness.

Anderson, Kelly E., "Project SWINGs Kids Into the Classroom", Children Today, November/December 1981, 10:18-20.

The author discussed the SWING (Starting With Individual Growth) Program in North Carolina's Alamance and Caswell counties. SWING was designed for five-year-olds with potential problems, to diagnose and aid in coping before beginning school. The program lasts a six-week session; intense counseling with parents and regular classroom teachers help to pave the way for transition to school. The child may be enrolled in the program from six weeks to one year, depending on needs.

CONCLUSION

When is the best age to begin formal education?

The research concluded that reading ability, as an entity, was not affected by the school entry age of the child. Also concluded was that more early-entry children were referred for special and psychological services and referred less often for programs servicing the gifted and talented. These facts would suggest that early-entry children have the ability to overcome academic obstacles, but would not possess the maturity to effectively handle the emotional demands of formal schooling. Screening instruments were found to be less effective than expert teacher observation for labeling readiness traits. Kindergarten teachers appear to be the most reliable referring agent to available resources for accommodating individual deficits or assets.

How do we meet the needs of incoming students?

Several alternatives to the traditional school entry process were reviewed in this study. The traditional start is, indeed, the easiest, least time-consuming system. However, it has been proven through the research that it is also the least respectful of development. Retention at the kindergarten or first grade levels suggests failure to child, parent and teacher. A program designed to allow the child time to grow emotionally, mentally and physically before entering first grade allows the child the half-day experience of kindergarten and the chance to prove himself in a school situation. If necessary, a transitional, full-day program before the formal school experience is most beneficial. Entry into school before the fifth birthday has not proven popular with parents nor teachers due to the emotional and social level of the four-year-olds.

SUMMARY

The point of agreement for researchers was the parents' central role in the crucial growth period before school entry. The complex social interaction between parent and child with its effect on the child's later school performance, specifically in the linguistic area, was emphasized by Snow (1983) and reiterated by Guthrie (1983). Kontos (1983) revealed that parents' verbal directions contributed significantly to the metacognitive content of preschoolers' understanding of a given task. Kontos, Smith and Tager-Flusberg (1982) acknowledged that preschoolers' metalinguistic capacities are more extensive than previous thought had maintained. They concluded with Snow, Metzer and Guthrie that the parents participation in linguistic development and ability to accurately assess their child's capabilities were critical to professionals. Sinatra (1983) stated further the physiological fact that two-thirds of adult brain weight is completed by the end of the first year of life giving credence to parents' integral crucial role during the early formative years of a child's life.

Studies by Siegel and Pollitt (1982) concluded that factors including nutrition, socioeconomic status, birth order, maternal smoking, illness during the perinatal period contributing to physiological advancement, did reveal a statistically significant covariation to mental development. Factors in the affective domain, encouraged through parental support, including positive attitude, curiosity and intrinsic motivation, were found to hold significance in attaining the level of formal operation of thought as defined by Piaget in studies by Gottfried (1983), Swanson (1982, and Hawkins (1982). Ames and Thies reviewed checklists for parental assessment of behaviors and

learning styles of their preschooler, acknowledging the importance of parental interaction and observation. Citing evidence of the effectiveness of parental involvement in preschool intervention programs, Burgess (1982) outlined a training program designed to reinforce skills taught in the preschool program, building upon parent-child interaction to sustain gains made.

Zigler and Lang (1983) reviewed a linear study of the Head Start program, citing long-term benefits including higher reading and achievement scores than peers, and placement in expected grade level in regular classrooms. In moving to a nationwide voluntary accreditation system, the National Association for the Education of Young Children reviewed the components of a good preschool program. Spodek, David and Saracho discussed further upgrading of preschool teacher preparation programs and training. Addressing the wide range of abilities and new accountability in preschool programs, Kitano listed behaviors and traits of young gifted children with specific strategies for diagnosis and challenge. The cognitive development and capabilities of preschoolers were explored in studies by Christie (1983), Giareili (1982), Cherkes (1983), Eisner (1982) and Stevens (1982).

Collins and Demos (1983) reviewed results of a cross-cultural survey, listing new trends in early reading instruction. More comprehensive instruction aimed at earlier ages was a common new thrust, coupled with prereading experiences at very early ages.

Backman (1983), Badian (1982), Roberge (1982) and Hart (1983) detailed changes in early reading programs resulting from the downshifting of instruction to younger ages and increased knowledge of the young child's mental abilities.

In reference to the effects of age of school entry on academic achievement, DiPasquale, Moule, Flewelling (1980), Toepfer (1981), Maddux, Stacy and Scott (1981) concluded that school entry age is a significant factor. They agreed that early-entry children are significantly more likely to be referred for special services regarding academic problems in the primary grades. Gredler's study of American and foreign children (1978, 1980) disputed the contention that school entry age has a correlation to reading ability. Gredler's findings showed that the percentage of poor readers at the end of first grade is essentially the same, in light of a difference in mean ages of two years between British and Swedish children studied.

Screening instruments and assessment measures for young children were reviewed by Fletcher and Satz (1982), Erwin (1983), Barclay (1983), Lipson, Obrzut, Bolocofsky, Heath and Jones (1981). The selected tests screened significant areas within a kindergartner's attention span. In his review, Lichtenstein (1982) summaried that investment and reliance upon a single assessment tool with young children is poor. Similarly, Troike (1983) and Muir (1984) exposed the limitations and misuse of testing young children.

Alternatives to the traditional starting time for kindergarten; during the fall of the fifth year of life, school systems are experimenting with more individualized starting criteria. Caldwell (1983), Benedict, Gerardi and Coolidge (1983) and Anderson (1981) advocated early entrance, beginning school at four years of age for developmentally advanced youngsters. Answering to the child with a developmental lag, emotional problems, academic problems, or a combination of the three areas of deficit; Curry, Solem and Ballard offered three different programs, adding an extra year of school for

needed growth. Haake proposes beginning school on the fifth birthday to maximize individually-paced learning. The underlying concepts of alternative programs are discussed by May and Campbell (1981). They maintained that the proliferation of "readiness" programs has been caused by a climate where large numbers of children were failing in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Children enter school following the traditional starting age requirement.
2. After the initial kindergarten experience, each child be screened as to the readiness level for first grade.
3. A transitional program be offered for children needing a year to grow and mature before entering first grade.

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BACKGROUND

A. B.A. from Goshen College (1977)

B. One year experience as an elementary school library aide.

C. Seven years teaching experience.

1. One year teaching second grade
2. Four years teaching first grade
3. Two years teaching a Readiness class

D. Currently teaching a Readiness class as a transitional class between kindergarten and first grade.

1. Have implemented program through parent-teacher surveys, research, formation of committees, material selection, program objectives and goals, curriculum development.
2. Am revising and evaluating program for continuing succees and growth.

E. Interest in study due to current evaluation and revision of the Readiness program